



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DEATH-PSYCHOLOGY OF HISTORICAL PERSON-AGES

By ARTHUR MACDONALD, Washington, D. C.

A summary of the last words of those distinguished people in history, records of whom have come down to us, is a psychology of their death.

Before presenting the results of such a summary, and in order to understand better the significance of words during the dying hour, it may be useful to note a few points as to death itself.

THE DYING HOUR

In another place, the author has treated in detail the physiology and psychology of death.¹ Here it may be stated that death is neither rapid nor sudden, but is preceded by a period of transition, which begins as soon as the reactionary forces of the organism have ceased and combat has ended.

The death-act is often confounded with the symptoms of disease which precede it. Dying begins after these symptoms have subsided; there is a pause in nature, the disease has conquered, the battle is over, and all is tranquil.

This transition-stage, or dying hour, may last for a longer or shorter time; in the great majority of cases persons are unconscious. Thus the natural death appears to be a brain-death.

But when there is consciousness during the dying hour, it depends upon nutrition and provision of the brain with blood. As there are three ways of physical death, (1) by brain, (2) by heart, and (3) by lungs, so there are three kinds of psychological death. The first is where there is little or no delirium, and intelligence not only continues to the end, but becomes very acute; physical prostration appears to be replaced by intellectual exaltation. Another kind of psychological death results from diseases only secondarily connected with the brain; the mind is in a mixed state between reason and delirium. The third kind of mental death includes all the lesions of the brain, which are almost always accompanied by loss of understanding; delirium is a symptom; there is a general obscuration of intelligence, and complete loss of consciousness.

¹ *Medical Times*, N. Y. City, 1921.

FEAR OF DEATH

In life the fear of anything is often much worse than the thing itself. This is especially true in the case of death. When the dying hour comes, the fear of death disappears.

Whether it is the brain, heart or lungs which give the signal of death, the brain-forces are usually weakened or destroyed first, causing sensation to lessen or cease. Whether there be consciousness to the last, or only at times, depends upon the nature of the disease and the mental and moral character of the person dying; and this in connection with surrounding conditions. In old age, death is the last sleep, showing no difference from normal sleep. The general consensus of opinion based upon the experience of all ages is that the dreadfulness of death and its physical pain are for the most part in the imagination.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF DEATH OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS IN HISTORY

The average man usually dies unknown; whatever he thinks and says is soon forgotten. Fine and significant words may be lost. Now and then a physician may take the pains to note the last words of some of his patients. There may be a dozen cases, or more; but the outcome is small compared with the great number of those dying every day. Therefore almost all the last words recorded at death are those of eminent and distinguished persons.

This table represents a first attempt to summarize the mental condition, at or just before death, of distinguished persons from the beginning of history up to the present time. Only the most reliable sources have been utilized; and even here where there appeared to be any doubt the persons were omitted, so that we have remaining but 794 cases. It must be remembered, however, that very few death-bed experiences are published, and still fewer are described with sufficient accuracy to be made the object of scientific study.

Taking into consideration the very many and varied sources, in all periods of history, which have been consulted, the regularity of the figures in the table is remarkable. Such uniformity, coming out of most heterogeneous conditions, when put into statistical form, suggests that death is a great equalizer and leveler for all humanity. In a way, the conduct and last words of those facing death are a mental and moral test of their real character.

PSYCHOLOGY OF DEATH OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS IN HISTORY

Profession or Occupation	Number of Persons	Average Age	Manner of Death					At Death Number		Mental State of Dying Persons																	
			Violence					Pain		Last Words At or Just Before Death																	
																									Executed	Killed in Battle	Suicide
Religious	Sarcastic, Jocose	Request, Directions Admonition	Question, Answer, Exclamation	Contented	Discontented	More or Less In- different	Religious	Sarcastic, Jocose	Request, Directions Admonition	Question, Answer, Exclamation	Contented	Discontented	More or Less In- different														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
Religious	192	56	42	0	0	4	46	146	12	3	39	6	26	10	66	17	30	23	10	17	2	25	22	19	12		
Royalty	91	50	23	5	2	7	37	54	5	4	11	7	8	11	13	15	16	18	17	23	6	20	23	13	12		
Military	75	51	21	21	1	6	49	26	31	2	2	1	20	8	15	13	17	11	0	16	6	11	16	17	17		
Philosophers	102	60	7	0	5	2	14	58	5	0	9	6	11	14	28	8	17	9	16	11	5	8	11	16	20		
Literateurs	106	64	6	2	1	2	11	95	10	0	9	24	8	9	23	10	27	18	12	14	5	14	15	16	16		
Physicians and Sci- entists	54	64	3	0	0	0	3	51	4	2	4	1	8	3	18	3	10	9	0	8	5	23	11	10	10		
Artists	39	63	0	0	0	0	0	39	4	2	3	2	0	8	7	4	9	21	13	0	3	12	16	9	9		
Poets	69	56	3	1	1	0	5	64	3	2	4	5	8	8	17	2	18	20	24	14	3	15	16	15	15		
Statesmen	96	65	18	1	2	6	27	69	6	4	8	5	14	10	26	14	17	14	45	18	3	10	14	12	12		
Women	70	56	29	0	3	0	22	48	7	3	7	3	9	6	17	11	9	12	34	63	8	11	15	15	15		
Totals	794	60	142	30	15	27	214	580	59	21	93	60	112	87	227	96	170	18	20	19	5	16	16	14	14		
Total Averages ...			18	4	2	3	27	73	63	35	26	17	31	26	46	19	35				Average Variations						
Percentages																					13	11	16	3	9	9	9

The persons whose records we have studied are classified, according to occupation, into ten divisions, as indicated in the first column of the table. Those whose profession was of a religious character are the largest in number (192), which is due doubtless to the power of religion throughout all history. Under "philosophers" are included mathematicians and educators. As the number of women was not large enough to make subdivisions, all women are placed together.

It will be seen from the third column of the table, which gives the average age, that the great majority of men who become eminent must live at least fifty years. Royalty and Military show the lowest average age, due in part to the large number of deaths by violence, which is the case also with Religious, Statesmen and Women. In short, all the ages in divisions where there are many deaths by violence would of course have a much higher average age had they lived their natural lives.

If we eliminate this factor of death by violence, the Poets and Artists die the youngest; thus Keats died at 26, Byron at 36, Burns at 37, Poe at 38, and Addison at 47. In the columns for pain or little or no pain at death, it will be seen that in only 80 cases out of 794 was any reference made to this matter, indicating that the question of pain at death is regarded as of little importance. In the last 14 columns of the table is presented the mental state at death or just before death, as shown by the last words. It will be noted, from column 13 at the bottom, that 17 percent were sarcastic or jocose, indicating a high degree of mental control. In fact some of the dying complained that it was taking too long and they were getting tired. A relatively large number (24, or 37 percent.) of writers and authors (literateurs) were jocose or sarcastic or both (column 13); they also were relatively the freest from pain (column 10).

The Military show much the relatively highest number of requests, directions or admonitions (column 14) in their last words. The Philosophers stand relatively high in questions, answers and exclamations (column 15). In general it will be noted (columns 12-15) that requests, directions and admonitions were most frequent (31 percent).

More than twice as many (46 percent.) were contented than were discontented (19 percent), as is seen at the end of columns 16 and 17; this accords with the fact that 65 percent had little or no pain, and 35 percent had pain. Thirty five percent were indifferent (column 18); but they all took about the same number of words to express their feelings

(averages, columns 23, 24, 25). While relatively few of the Statesmen and Women were sarcastic (column 13), they took many more words to express themselves (column 20) than the others; the Poets also had as high an average as 24 words. In requests, directions and admonitions the Women show an average of 63 words, which is three times as great as that of any of the others, except Royalty, which has 23 (column 21).

As to expressing contentment or discontentment, the Religious and Royalty used the most words, except for contentment, where the Physicians and Scientists have an average of 22 words (column 23). The Artists and Scientists used the fewest words of all (averages 9, 10) to express their indifference (column 24).

REFERENCES

- Book of Death.
Chambers' Biographical Dictionary.
Egbert, Walter R. Last Words of Famous Men and Women. Morristown, Pa., 1898, 792 pp.
Kaines, Joseph. Last Words of Eminent Persons. London, 1866, 397 pp.
Lippincott, Biographical History.
Marvin, Frederick R. The Last Words of Distinguished Men and Women. New York, 1901, 80, 336 pp.